

Chair Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Minority Member Thomas, and the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

I write to express my support for SB 11 currently being considered—a bill that would provide basic, common sense employment nondiscrimination protections for all Ohioans while maintaining an employer’s ability to making crucial employment-related decisions on the basis of work-related qualities.

I am a member of the LGBT community in Columbus. I was born here and, although I moved away for a period of time, I am thankful to call Columbus home once again.

As a young adult proceeding through the process of coming to terms with my sexual orientation, particularly with respect to reconciling that identity with my faith identity as a Christian, I was employed at a non-profit organization that required as a condition of employment for me to sign a contract obligating me to, among other things, “not harbor homosexual desires.” The contract articulated in no uncertain terms that a perceived violation of this policy, whether or not amounting to an actual violation, would be grounds for termination.

As I simultaneously worked at the organization, making what I hoped would be meaningful contributions toward the cause of the organization and receiving a promotion for having done so, and sorted through the implications of being gay, an undeniable sense of anxiety developed within me as I knew two things were true:

- First, in the long-term, I knew I was approaching a crossroads in which I would have to choose whether to live honestly or remain employed at an organization I loved and for a cause I supported wholeheartedly.
- Second, and more immediately, my livelihood was at risk. I felt constantly afraid that if I said too much, or not enough, suspicion would be raised and I would be fired. As a result, tremendous energy was spent during this period to filter myself, providing as few details about myself as possible—not because I wanted to, but because I felt I had to.

In many workplaces, particularly within the non-profit community, the organization or company represents a family—the central motivation toward the cause creates deep and, ultimately, productive bonds. So, to withdraw myself for fear of being fired ultimately presented a cost to myself and to the organization.

Comparing this experience to the experience at my current employer—OhioHealth, an organization which explicitly prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation—the resulting productivity and fulfillment could not be more pronounced. At OhioHealth, I am confident that my work performance and qualifications alone determine the opportunities available to me; whether I advanced forward in my career is a function of my skills and abilities, not who I love. And, along the way, I am permitted to be myself and connect to my organization and colleagues in meaningful—and honest—ways.

Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation exists within the state of Ohio and causes profound disruption in the lives of those who must filter who they are in order to remain employed. I am proud of the city of Columbus and many employers within the city who have taken steps to ensure a more equal work environment--it's time for the state of Ohio as a whole to do the same, to speak clearly and directly to the LGBT community that we are welcome, our skills are needed, and that Ohio can be home.

Thank you kindly for your consideration of this bill. If I can be of any assistance to answer any questions or provide any additional personal insight, please consider me a resource—I am happy to help in any way that I can.

Sincerely,

Cody Cassady